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ABSTRACT

This paper lists the basic or foundation skills that future citizens must have, according to the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills: communications skills, mathematical skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and personal traits such as responsibility, self-esteem, and self-management. It then shows how these skills can be applied through a description of a fictional company and some of its employees' tasks. The report emphasizes the complexity of work and the responsibility and self-direction that employees need in order to succeed.

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**Skills You Will Need for the Future—
No Matter What Your Job or Where You Work
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Skills you will need for the future---

no matter what your job or where you work

Your future will be one of change. With the rapid advance of technology, our lives are changing every day. Television and a multi-cultural population introduce us to the entire world; machines of all kinds are doing many of the things we used to do manually. There are many new processes, cultures and ideas that we need to learn and understand in order to succeed in our lives. Workplaces are beginning to differ also; employees are being given responsibilities of many kinds: buying new equipment, correcting other's work, and increasing customer satisfaction, to name a few. There is much more flexibility in the workplace, and therefore, more self-direction is necessary. Eventually, continual training will be provided so that employees can keep up with these changes. This means that employees will be continually learning. People will be working on teams; their work tasks will be integrated with others. Employees' ideas will be sought for solving problems, cutting costs, reducing errors, and improving the workplace in general.

If you stand still and do not grow, your life will be filled with frustration and stress. You will not work effectively with your co-workers. In order to prepare yourself for this changing world, you must acquire several skills which the workworld will require you to have. The U.S. Department of Labor has issued its final *SCANS Report for America 2000* entitled "Learning a Living: a Blueprint for High Performance." Read carefully and prepare yourself for this workworld, where you and your friends will spend at least 25% of your future hours. Make life easier and more fun!

Basic or Foundation Skills--According to the Department of Labor, the basic or "foundation" skills which our future citizens must have include the following:

Communications Skills:

- Reading--You must be able to locate, understand and interpret written information.
- Writing--You must communicate complete and accurate thoughts, ideas, and information in a written form appropriate to the subject matter and audience.
- Listening--You must receive, interpret and respond to verbal messages and other cues, such as body language, from people of all backgrounds.
- Speaking--You must organize your ideas and communicate messages orally to listeners in an appropriate manner; then, you must respond appropriately to your listener's feedback and ask questions as needed.

Mathematical Skills:

- Arithmetic--You must be able to perform basic computations and use basic numerical concepts without a calculator, and you must be able to correctly interpret quantitative information.
- Mathematics--You must be able to approach a practical problem and choose a correct mathematical technique to solve the problem.

Problem Solving/Decision Making Skills:

- Creative Thinking--You must generate new ideas and create solutions by using learned information.
- Decision Making--You must decide what must be done based on information you have learned.
- Problem Solving--You must recognize that a problem exists, identify solutions, and implement them.
- Mental Visualization--You must be able to picture things in your mind without actually seeing them.
- Know How to Learn--You must know the proper techniques and strategies to apply in order to learn new concepts and tasks.
- Reasoning--You must be able to understand the relationship between or among several objects, ideas, facts, and situations.

Personal Traits:

- Responsibility--You must complete tasks which you start and complete them in an acceptable manner.
- Self-Esteem--You must believe in yourself and your self-worth, knowing your own abilities and skills.
- Sociability--You must relate appropriately to others in many different types of situations and demonstrate friendliness, adaptability, and interest.
- Self-Management--You must accurately assess your own knowledge, skills and abilities and then set realistic goals for yourself. You must also exhibit self-control and motivation to achieve your tasks.
- Integrity/Honesty--You must recognize situations and conditions which might request that you break commonly held personal or societal values; you must understand the effects of violating these beliefs and codes and then choose an ethical course of action.

Just how will some of these skills be needed and used in the workplace? A description of a fictional company and some of its employees' tasks is on the next three pages; these descriptions will give you an idea of why you will need these attributes.

XYZ, Inc. is a Fortune 500 company in the U.S. It employs over 85,000 people throughout the country. It's factories produce a wide range of products and has also entered into the service sector. Therefore, it employs people with skills of many kinds. Let's look at some entry-level positions in XYZ to see how employees must use the basic or foundation skills in their everyday jobs. On the back page, you can read how employees use the "Workplace Competencies" which are explained on page three. **Zee Bicycle Plant.** Marsha is a machine operator in the bicycle plant.

Even though she was able to get this position with no



specific training before starting at Zee, she has had a great deal of on-the-job-training. Marsha has several instruction manuals which explain the setup of the machines which she has had to **learn**; in some cases, she has had to **learn** the technical language involved with the job. In addition, she must be able to **read** and

follow production schedules, workorders which explain exactly what parts she must run, and bills-of-material, which explain what parts and materials she must use. There are also safety manuals to **follow** as well as company policy and procedures manuals

Over the years, Marsha **has learned** that all of these items may not be accurate. Therefore, she must always **read for accuracy** and **judge** the facts and errors. If the bill-of-material is incorrect, her parts would be incorrectly produced. In order to create quality products with the cheapest cost possible, Marsha always **checks for errors** on her paperwork. In addition, Marsha must **use arithmetic skills** to **set up** machines and then **measure** the first parts which are produced from her machine. Many times if special parts are to be produced, she will need to work with fractions, addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. She must also **use charts and diagrams** and has **learned** to read **scaled blueprints**.

Because the machine operators are organized into a workteam, each member is expected to run all the machines in the department. Depending upon what parts need to be run, the teams' production figures vary from day to day. Some of the machines are old and break down often. The team has been asked to **solve the problem**. The employees will have to **develop** records on which machines break down most often, which parts are affected, and the cost of new machines. They must also **review** the department **budget** for replacing machines. During this project, Marsha and all team members must be able to **listen and speak carefully**; Marsha must **assess** what others are saying and respond appropriately. She will need to **critically evaluate** the solutions which are proposed by various people, **ask appropriate questions**, and **discuss** things calmly. She will also **bring into play her problem-solving, decision-making, and creative thinking skills**. There may not be enough money to purchase all new machines. Or it may be possible to buy one machine which can do several of the production tasks which several machines are now doing. Marsha must **evaluate** the team members facts and ideas, while **combining information and thinking** of new possibilities. The group must **consider the impact of its decision, look at alternatives** and **consider the risks**. Members may also need a **mental picture** of the machines, where they will be placed and see if the area will have to be redesigned. If redesigning the area is necessary, the project cost will increase. All of these efforts will entail **learning and reasoning**. More **learning** will also take place if new machines are purchased. The



latest technology uses **electronically programmed controls**; the controls being used now are set up by hand. The team will have to **present** its plan and all of this information to the manufacturing management personnel for approval to carry out the solutions.

Not only in production, but in many of the other parts of the company, people will have to use these same skills everyday. For instance, while the office groups will have many of the same tasks, they will have to use more **writing skills**, and possibly **listening and speaking skills** than the production employees. However, for each employee group, some skills will be stressed more than others, but all will come into play in some way. These employees will also **work in teams** at times, while **individual responsibility** will be required in other situations.

The Come 'n Get It restaurant chain In one of the restaurants which XYZ now runs, assistant manager Reggie uses many of the various skills already described. He **deals with** employees, with customers, with repair people, with suppliers, with his boss, and with company officials. Again, he is **responsible for reading** company manuals, reports, memos, policies, and information on the restaurant industry. He has to **write** monthly reports for headquarters and announcements for employees. He is in **charge of** bank deposits, the cash register and bookkeeping at times. He often has to **calculate** overtime wages and in addition, **explain** an employee's paycheck and **verify** the deductions for things like taxes and social security. When employee problems come up, he **listens and speaks carefully** in order to **solve those problems**. One problem which arose was a personality conflict which occurred between two people working together. Reggie used

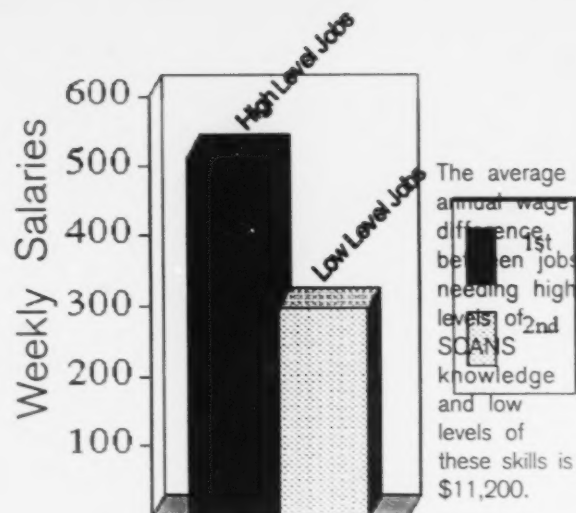


some **creative thinking** to satisfy the two employees by offering a more flexible scheduling process. Now, the two employees seldom work together. A **problem** he has now been given to handle is the kitchen layout. Reggie will **work with the employees** on a new design; it will be best if he can visualize the results before actually moving equipment. Another trait Reggie must display is a great deal of **self-management, integrity and reasoning** when he **deals with** an irate customer. He is aware of the impression he is making on the customer, and he knows he **cannot** make the customer more angry by **saying the wrong thing or using the wrong tone of voice**. Reggie has access to supplies and to the money in the restaurant, but he is never tempted to use these things for his own use; **his own behavior** helps to set the standard for other employees.

All employees in every job must **be on time** and **have good attendance**. No place of business can run well with people absent. The workers must be **positive about their work and work hard** to get the jobs done. These characteristics are also important for all



employees. A poor employee can have a major impact on a workplace and make it unpleasant for everyone.



Workplace Competencies is another area of know-how which the SCANS Report discusses. These abilities are broken down into the following categories:

Management Skills:

- **Manage Time**--You must be able to select required activities, rank them in order of importance, assign a time-frame for completing the activity and then follow the schedule you prepare.
- **Manage Money**--You must be able to use a budget, including forecasting the use of funds, keep records, track expenditures, and make adjustments when necessary.
- **Manage Resources**--You must be able to acquire, store, and distribute materials, equipment, and/or space in an efficient manner.

People Skills:

- **Manage Human Resources**--You must be able to utilize and reward people appropriately in the workplace.
- **Participate as a Team-Member**--You must work cooperatively with others and contribute to the group effort.
- **Teach Others**--You must help others learn needed knowledge and skills.
- **Serve Clients/Customers**--You must work and communicate with clients and customers to satisfy their expectations.
- **Exercise Leadership**--You must be able to motivate individuals or groups toward a goal.
- **Negotiate a Decision**--You should be able to work toward an agreement that may involve exchanging resources or resolving differences.
- **Work with Cultural Diversity**--You must be able to work well with males and females of all ages and races from a variety of ethnic, social, educational, and religious backgrounds.

Information Skills:

- **Acquire and Evaluate Information**--You must be able to identify a need for data, and then obtain or create and evaluate the data.
- **Organize and Maintain Information**--You should be able to organize, process, and maintain information in a systematic fashion.
- **Interpret and Communicate Information**--You should be able to select and analyze information and then communicate the results to others in the appropriate manner.
- **Use Computers to Process Information**--You must be able to utilize computers to acquire, organize, analyze, and communicate information.



Popular Voices is another subsidiary of XYZ, Inc. Maria is a group leader in the packaging department at this record company which produces all the latest compact discs and cassettes. In this role, Maria is **responsible** for the daily department production numbers. Although she has responsibilities for the quantity of materials packaged throughout the day, she also must **work hand in hand** with her **co-workers**. She is not only a **leader**, but she also works alongside the other department employees. She is

paid more than her co-workers for both her **planning**, **problem solving** and **decision-making** roles as well as for her actual packaging work.

Each day, the group is assigned to fill a certain number of orders; the number is posted each morning by the Shipping Department Manager. That number is based on what has been produced by the factory as well as by the orders the company has. Because it is necessary to **keep customers satisfied**, the group must try to meet the daily postings.

Therefore, Maria must carefully **plan** the day. For instance, she must look at **attendance**. Today, one of the employees is **absent**, and she must **plan** on working overtime herself in order to **help** more on the packaging line. Her paper work will be **finished** after the 4 p.m. whistle dismisses the first shift employees. She must also know if there are certain orders which are "hot;" these orders must be sent today or the customer will cancel the orders and the company will lose money on items which have been made but not sold. She must **look over** her production orders carefully and in some instances, **communicate** with others to find out about special orders. Then, she must **schedule** the orders in **order of importance**. She also usually tries to get one large order out in the morning and one in the afternoon. Around those, she often **schedules** smaller ones so that her group feels as if it is getting things finished.

Maria must also **be certain** that she has enough plastic film delivered to her department each day as well as enough labels and boxes to get everything packaged quickly and properly. If the group runs out of any of its necessary items, the employees will have nothing to do until items are delivered. Therefore, she must **plan** on materials. At times, it is necessary to **negotiate** with the Supplies Warehouse and **ask** them to split materials between two departments so that she doesn't run out.

She also must **plan** on who will be working on the plastic wrap machines and who will be working on the labeling machines. The group has an **agreement** that members will **rotate**. However, Jean has come in today with a sore elbow, and it is painful for her to run the labeling machine, where normally she would be today. This **problem** will cause some shuffling around of employees, and some employees do not enjoy having their normal routine interrupted. Maria must try to **keep everyone happy**. In addition, a new employee is **starting** today. Maria will be **introducing** him to the department **routine** and also begin **training** him on the plastic wrap machine. During the employment **interview**, Maria noticed that her new employee had an accent and that sometimes, it was difficult to understand him. She knows that she will have to **make him feel comfortable** among the group members and **ensure** that he **understands** all instructions on



the job. She has **asked** one of her group employees, whom she knows is **understanding**, to **work with him closely** this week. It will be especially important during the project meetings they often have.

In fact, a **major project** is coming up in the department today. Some customers have asked that the cassettes and compact discs no longer be automatically wrapped in packages of ten. They are asking for smaller quantities. This is going to greatly impact production and the amount of materials used. After lunch, Maria will be holding a meeting with the group to **discuss ways** in which members might be able to keep up with the usual number of items shipped out each day even though it will take more packaging and time. She will **be presenting some of her ideas** and also **asking for their input**. She knows that if the group doesn't **decide together** on what changes will be made, the group will not adapt to the changes as well.



The departments have also been asked to **watch their budgets**. It will cost more money to package the products, so Maria must **find other ways** to cut costs in her department, if possible. She will be **presenting that problem** to her group, also. Through group members' **suggestions and ideas**, she hopes that **solutions** can be reached to keep **productivity** at its current rate and costs down. She will have to **keep careful records** of these points for the next several months for future **reporting**. She has learned that the **personal computer** in her department allows her to do this with ease. The **database** which she updates daily will let her review the last two years' production and **cost data** for comparisons. It will also let her **write reports** easily, neatly and quickly.

Do these work situations sound complex? You may have thought that people go to work, do their routine jobs, and return to their homes after their work hours are over. That was the workworld of the past--BUT NO LONGER! Rarely, in most firms throughout the country, does one person make a decision in a department and impose it on all members of that department. Group input is asked for. U.S. managers now know that better decisions and solutions are the result of many ideas. Therefore, teamwork is used not only on the sports field but also in the work place. However, at times, you will be expected to work independently, with only yourself as the quality inspector of your work. You must be prepared to read, think, communicate, teach and help others, and learn--all for the sake of your place of work and for the customer. Don't wait until you get to the workworld to gain these skills. Start learning these skills today--through club and school projects, committee work, on the playing field and in the classroom. You can even start practicing at home with your family. It is a great group to work with, forgiving you when you fail. Where else better to learn?